Black leaders out to sink DA's incredible coalition

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It's no secret, the hottest race in town is for the job of district attorney. This particular contest has become even more volatile as a result of the recent acquittal of incumbent Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison on conspiracy charges lodged by U.S. Attorney Gerald Gallinghouse. Prior to the acquittal one of the contending candidates for the office was actually leading Mr. Garrison in the polls.

The key question now apparently is what impact will the acquittal have on what once seemed certain defeat for The Giant.

In order to analyze this contest it is first necessary to analyze the nature of the constituency that put and has kept Jim Garrison in office.

One would expect a paradoxical individual such as Garrison to have a paradoxical constituency. In few instances have expectations been so fully met. Garrison has done the near impossible in fashioning a coalition of low to moderate income whites with the vast bulk of black registered voters in the city.

The benevolent Giant

Even though these two groups have a great many needs and problems in common, for some reason they have never quite seen it that way. They have been constantly pitted against each other in one battle after another by those politicians wily enough to play upon each group's suspicions of the other to their mutual detriment.

It is assumed by most politicians that you can have one group or the other but definitely not both. Not so with Jim Garrison. For the black community he has offered a live and let live policy. The benevolent Giant won't do blacks any good, but, he won't do blacks any harm either. The plethora of black bars and their attendant vices (not all black bars by any means, but enough) are allowed to flourish in a rather uneasy posture by Tulane and Broad.

This detente was bolstered by an identification with a very strong black [illegible] issue, the Kennedy assassination. Garrison's probe, as ridiculous and cruel a hoax as it was, didn't quite come off that way in much of the black community. His indictment vis a vis the pinball industry could not possibly have been calculated to make him a bad guy in the black community. Pinball gambling, as such, was a way of life in many black areas, and if it was rumored that a few cops and the D.A. were getting greased to allow this cheap form of entertainment to exist, so be it. In the brother's world everybody's got some kind of a hustle.

Problem for police

So what if blacks kill and rape other blacks with near impunity. This is a problem for the police force (that ever popular organization). No one blames the DA for sloppy prosecutions, or total lack of prosecution. Put this all together, with the fear of retaliation considered by black politicians entertaining opposition of The Giant, and you get Jim Garrison, black hero. Jim Garrison has basically done nothing for the blacks who have consistently returned him to office.

How has Garrison maintained his sway over the other half of his unbelievable coalition? As the average black, prior to Richard Nixon, what institution has done more to improve the quality of his life that any other institution and he will tell you the federal government. Ask the average low to moderate income white what factor he thinks has contributed more to the miserable state of affairs that he envisions himself to be in than any other and he will tell you the federal government.

Jim Garrison is the medium through which all the pent-up hostilities of this class have made their mark on the federal establishment. He is colorful, engaging and gives these folks, their money's worth.

Things have changed

During the four year interim since he last sought reelection certain things have changed. Blacks have gotten far more sophisticated in their politics and are demanding a decent return on their voting investment. Life is bad enough, but when you can't leave your home at night and you're worried about the safety of your kids at school and your husband or wife on a night shift, or a shopping trip, it tends to get unbearable. Even so far as his white vote is concerned, all the attacks in the world on the federal government just don't seem to make things any better.

This is a different election. Garrison has two strong, serious contenders in Harry Connick and George Reese. Connick has taken the lion's share of black organized political support, who for the first time promise to "tell it like it is" on Big Jim.

This contest for Garrison's job is going to be won or lost in the black community, the acquittal is of little relevance there; the game is going to be played in the streets on a face to face basis between the organizations and the people. Their job must be a thorough one to offset The Giant's traditional last week TV blitz. After all, he doesn't want to be your king, he just wants to be your district attorney.